

Forging Rotary connections between North Carolina, Taiwan

Owen George is an entrepreneur, environmentalist, humanitarian, journalist, world traveler, and Rotarian. And he can trace all of these interests to his year abroad as a Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Scholar.

"The scholarship gave me something very special: confidence," says George, who studied at Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1980-81. "I know I can travel anywhere in the world and meet new people."

Now, he's helping the next generation experience the program's rewards by serving as a Rotarian sponsor counselor. George was selected by his club — the Rotary Club of Asheboro, North Carolina, USA (RI District 7690) — to assist Ambassadorial Scholar Lily Kuo, an American student who traveled to Taiwan in July to study at Tunghai University.

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George was the obvious choice. Not only is he a former scholar, but he speaks Mandarin Chinese. And according to Past District Governor Phil Morris, he was instrumental in obtaining the US\$26,000 Ambassadorial Scholarship from District

3460 in Taiwan during a Group Study Exchange there.

"His experience as a scholar made it possible for his GSE hosts to discuss with him the idea of contributing the cost of a scholarship to The Rotary Foundation," Morris says. George says when District Rotary Foundation Committee Chair John Wu contacted him with his offer, his only request was that George help make it a success.

Serving as Kuo's sponsor counselor is another link in a chain of events connecting George with Taiwan and his Rotary club. In 2004, shortly after joining the Asheboro club, he learned that the district was planning a Group Study Exchange with District 3460.

"Here is a place that I love like my second home. I speak the language. I thought to myself, Is it possible that I could be chosen as the district team leader?" he says.

Since 1991, George has visited Taiwan frequently, even spending two years teaching English as a second language in private schools and corporations. So despite being relatively new to Rotary, George was selected to lead the four-member GSE team. They traveled to Taiwan last year on a monthlong trip.

"The selection committee was concerned with George's lack of experience as a Rotarian. But his rich experience as a Rotary Scholar armed him with the enthusiasm that benefited the GSE team as well as District 7690," says Morris.

The Taiwanese district next proposed



Led by Owen George (far right), the District 7690 GSE team crossed many bridges of understanding during its study tour of Taiwan.

Interested in becoming a Rotarian?

If you're interested in joining a Rotary club, please complete the Prospective Member Form on the RI Web site at www.rotary.org. Click on About Us at the top, then click on Prospective Member Form at the middle of the page. Be sure to include information about your experience as a Rotary Foundation alumnus/alumna. Your form will be sent to Rotary district and club leaders in your area for follow-up.

a Rotary Friendship Exchange between the two countries. Last October, three Rotarians and two of their spouses from Taichung spent 10 days in Piedmont, North Carolina, as guests of District 7690. Plans are now underway for a group from North Carolina to visit Taiwan.

In the meantime, George — who owns his own public relations firm, writes for the local newspaper, and is president of

TreesAsheboro.org, a countywide environmental program — is helping Kuo enjoy the life-changing experience of being an Ambassadorial Scholar.

"You take a gifted young person. You sponsor them on a structured adventure. It's a social experiment that's helping to create a world of humanitarians," says George. "It's working magic."